DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 382 592 SP 035 950

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TITLE Who Is Teaching America's Schoolchildren?
INSTITUTION American Council on Education, Washington, D.C. Div. of Policy Analysis and Research.
PUB DATE 95
NOTE 13p.
AVAILABLE FROM Research Brief Series, American Council on Education, Dept. 36, Washington, DC 20055-0036 ($58 for 1-year subscription, $106 for 2-year subscription, single copies $10, member institutions receive a 10 percent discount).
PUB TYPE Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Statistical Data (110) -- Information Analyses (070)
JOURNAL CIT Research Briefs; v6 n2 1995

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cultural Background; Educational Trends; Elementary School Teachers; Elementary Secondary Education; Employment Patterns; Ethnic Groups; *Labor Turnover; Minority Groups; Private Schools; *Profiles; Public Schools; Secondary School Teachers; Sex; *Teacher Characteristics; *Teacher Supply and Demand; *Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

This research brief provides a profile of America's teachers, using data from the 1987-88 and 1990-91 "Schools and Staffing Survey" and from Bureau of Labor Statistics employment projections for 1992 through 2005. The research brief lists demographic characteristics of elementary and secondary teachers in public and private schools, examines proportional representation of teachers to students, explores where teachers teach and what they teach, notes the incidence of vacant teaching positions and difficulty in filling vacant teaching positions, and profiles teachers who leave. The paper concludes that the number of teachers has increased in recent years and is expected to continue to increase. Few male students and students of color will have teachers with similar backgrounds and characteristics in years to come. Only about one percent of all approved teaching positions were vacant in 1990-91. Positions in special education, general elementary education subjects, and mathematics were more difficult to fill than those in other subject areas. Approximately 7 percent of all public school teachers with 1 to 3 years of experience left the profession between 1990-91 and 1991-92. The paper describes three data sources and provides a list of members of the American Council on Education Board of Directors. (Contains 13 references.) (JDD)

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Who Is Teaching America's Schoolchildren?

LINDA KNOPP and EBO OTUYA

The number of children enrolled in the nation's elementary and secondary schools is projected to rise into the next decade, from 47 million in 1991 to 56 million in 2004 (*Projections of Education Statistics to 2004*, 1993). Likewise, the demand for teachers to instruct these students is expected to increase. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projects that between 1992 and 2005, employment for kindergarten, elementary, and secondary school teachers will increase by 34 percent, resulting in more than 1 million new jobs in the field. While many of these positions will be filled by teachers returning to the profession after an absence, some openings will be available for newly trained teachers.

HIGHLIGHTS

- The number of elementary/secondary teachers in the nation's public and private schools continues to increase. Between 1987–88 and 1990–91, the number of teachers in U.S. classrooms increased by 12 percent, from 2.6 million to 2.9 million.
- The number of men in the profession increased by 7 percent during the period, although their proportional representation decreased. Males made up only 27 percent of the teacher workforce in 1990–91, compared with 51 percent of the student population.
- Persons of color also gained teaching positions during the period, but the racial/ethnic composition of the teacher workforce still does not mirror the diversity within the student population. In 1990–91, 30 percent of the students were individuals of color, compared with only 13 percent of the teachers.
- Thirty percent of surveyed teachers with one year of experience said their training had not prepared them to teach students from a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds.
- School principals had the most difficulty filling vacant teaching positions in special education, general elementary subjects, and math.
- School systems have added teaching positions in most subject areas in recent years. Between 1987–88 and 1990–91, the number of K–12 school teachers in bilingual education/English as a second language increased by 30 percent, while the number teaching foreign languages increased by 20 percent.
- Approximately 7 percent of all public school teachers with one to three years of experience left the profession between 1990–91 and 1991–92, compared with 2 percent of those with 10–19 years of experience.
- New teachers who were thinking about leaving the profession most often cited a lack of support for students from parents, an absence of support from school administration, or a need to earn more money as reasons for their decision.

Linda Knopp is a Research Analyst in ACE's Division of Policy Analysis and Research. Ebo Otuya is Assistant Director of the Division and Editor of the Research Brief series.

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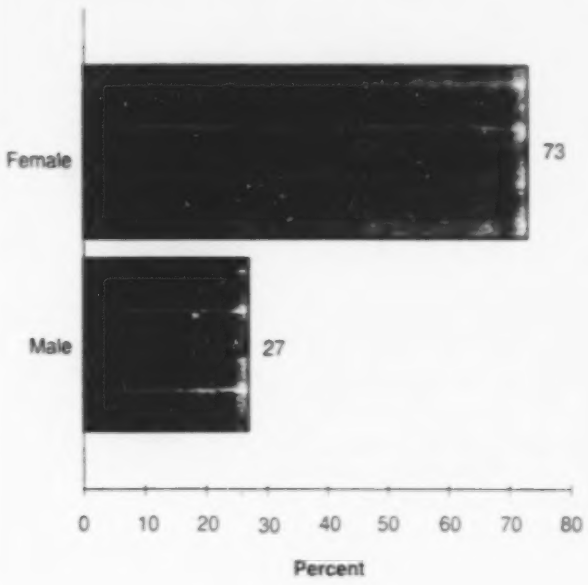
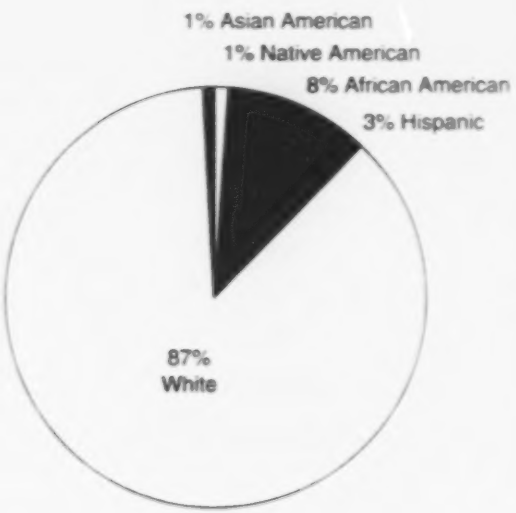
Figure 1

Who Are America's Teachers?

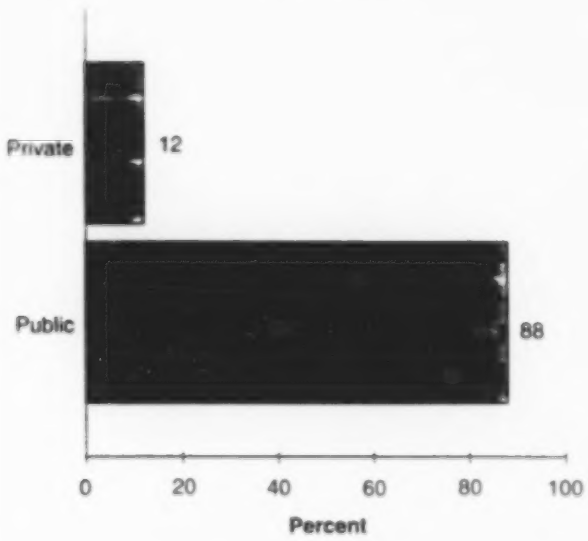
The majority of teachers are women...



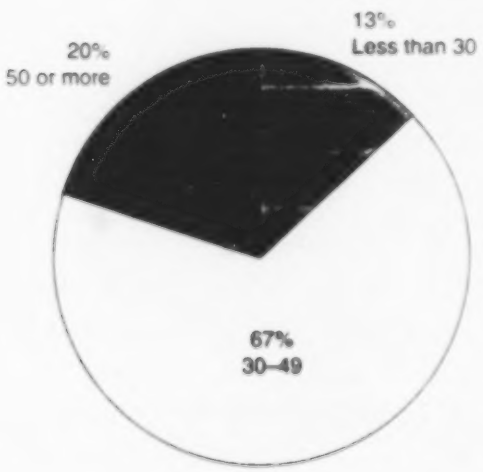
The majority are white...



Most teach in public schools...



Most are between the ages of 30 and 49...



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990–91*

These favorable employment projections will likely lead to an increase in the number of college students entering teacher education programs. Therefore, college administrators will find it useful to understand the classroom experiences of teachers so that they can better prepare today's education majors to become tomorrow's educators.

This brief provides a profile of America's teachers. Who are the teachers and who are their students? How has the number of teachers in the United States changed in recent years? What do they teach? Are teaching positions difficult to fill? Why do some teachers leave the profession?

This brief uses data from the 1987–88 and 1990–91 National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) *Schools and Staffing Survey* (SASS) and BLS employment projections for the years 1992 through 2005.

Who Are America's Teachers?

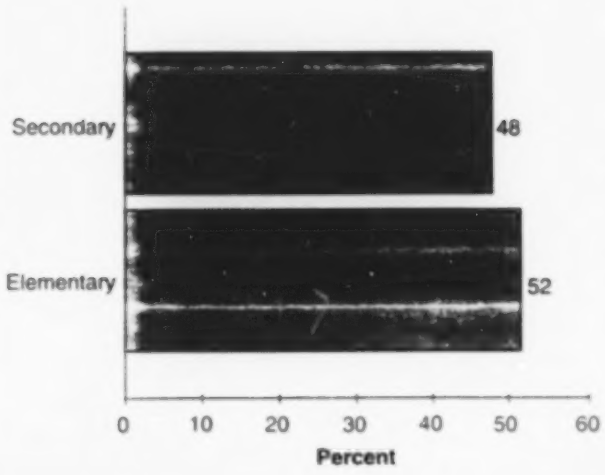
Monitoring basic demographic information on teachers can help predict potential problems in the overall supply of teachers or of certain types of teachers. For example, an aging teaching force could indicate a need for increased recruitment efforts to fill vacancies when teachers retire. Fewer female teachers could indicate that women are taking advantage of other career opportunities that are more open to them today than in the past. A low number of teachers from certain racial/ethnic categories could signal a need to actively seek out teachers from different backgrounds.

The demographic characteristics of the more than 2.9 million elementary and secondary teachers who were employed in public and private schools in 1990–91 are highlighted below (Figure 1):

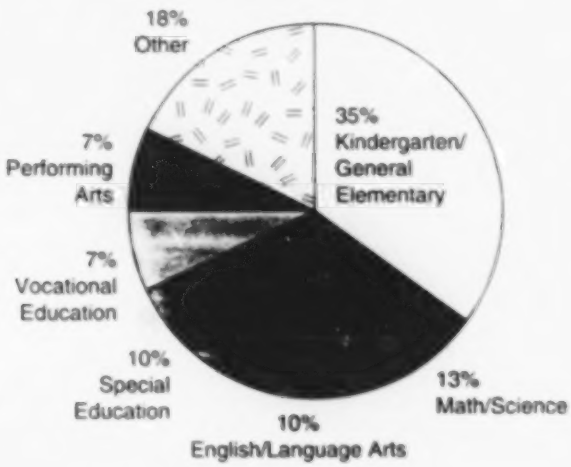
- Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) were women.
- Eighty-seven percent were white.
- More than two-thirds (67 percent) were between the ages of 30 and 49.
- Thirty-seven percent had between 10 and 20 years of teaching experience.
- Fifty-two percent taught in elementary schools.
- More than one-third (35 percent) taught kindergarten or general elementary subjects.
- Forty percent held master's degrees.
- Eighty-eight percent taught in public schools.

Figure1 *(continued)*
Who Are America's Teachers?

Most teach at the elementary level...



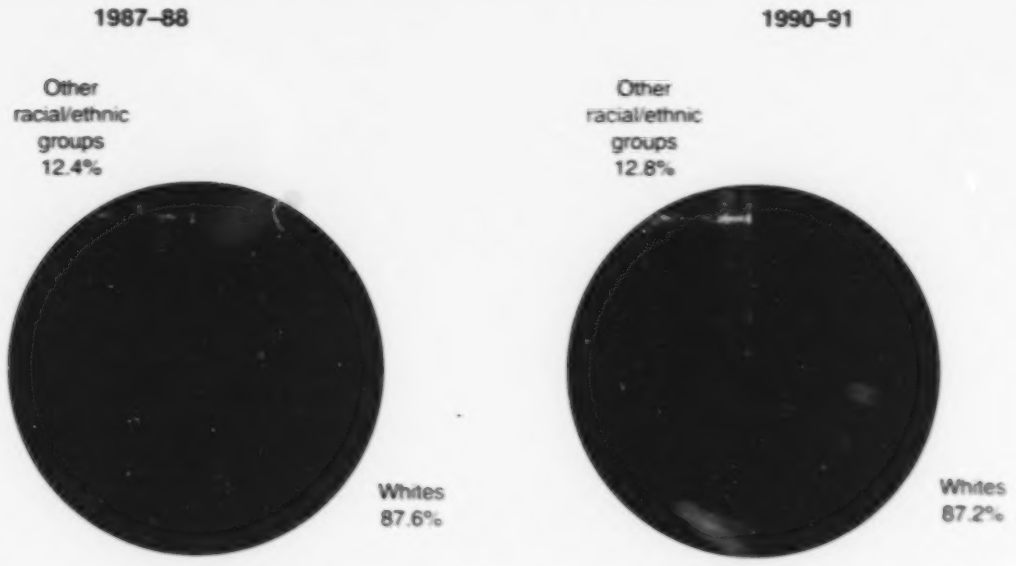
Many teach kindergarten or general elementary subjects.



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990–91*

Figure 2

Percentage Distribution of Teachers by Racial/Ethnic Status: 1987–88 and 1990–91



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990–91*.

- Forty-two percent of all public school teachers taught in only seven states: California, Florida, Illinois, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

The number of teachers in the classrooms of public and private schools increased by 12 percent between 1987–88 and 1990–91, from 2.6 million to 2.9 million. During this period of growth, under-represented groups such as men and persons of color gained in their number of teaching positions. However, these groups did not make progress in their share of the teacher workforce. Between 1987–88 and 1990–91:

- The number of male teachers increased by 7 percent (from 747,946 to 801,218). However, the proportion of male teachers in the teacher workforce declined slightly, from 29 percent in 1987–88 to 27 percent in 1990–91.

- The number of teachers of color increased by 16 percent (from 321,450 to 373,054). However, their share of the teacher workforce increased only slightly, from 12.4 percent in 1987–88 to 12.8 percent in 1990–91 (Figure 2).

Proportional Representation of Teachers to Students

Despite an increasing number of teachers from under-represented groups, the teacher workforce became more homogeneous as the number of women and whites in the profession grew. As a result, the demographic characteristics of America's teachers do not match those of their students.

- Nonwhites made up only 13 percent of the teacher workforce in 1990–91, while 30 percent of all students were individuals of color.

- Twenty-seven percent of all teachers in 1990–91 were male, compared with 51 percent of all elementary and secondary school students.

Although the number of teachers from various racial/ethnic groups is increasing, the share of students of color continues to outweigh the proportion of teachers of color (Figure 3). In 1990–91:

- Eight percent of all teachers were African Americans, compared with 15 percent of the students.

- Three percent of the teachers were Hispanics, compared with 11 percent of the students.

- One percent of the teachers were Asian Americans, compared with 3 percent of the students.

- One percent of both teachers and students were Native Americans.

By the year 2000, about one-third of all Americans are expected to be people of color. Students of color already constitute a majority in 13 of the 20 largest public school districts (*Digest of Education Statistics*, 1994).

A 1991 survey conducted by Louis Harris Associates, Inc., for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company found that 30 percent of teachers with one year of experience said their training had not prepared them to teach students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.[1] This sentiment was echoed in a study of nonwhite teacher education students highlighted in a recent article in the *Journal of Teacher Education*.

- Hood and Parker (1994) found that students interviewed said neither the curriculum nor the faculty prepared them to deal with racial diversity in the classroom.

- Administrators of education programs at two universities examined in the study cited the homogeneity of the teacher education faculty as one factor behind the lack of diversity training in the curriculum.

The 1993 *National Study of Postsecondary Faculty* conducted by NCES found that most full-time instructional faculty in teacher education programs in the United States were white.

- In the fall of 1992, 90 percent of the full-time instructors in teacher education were white and 7 percent were African American. Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans each made up 1 percent.

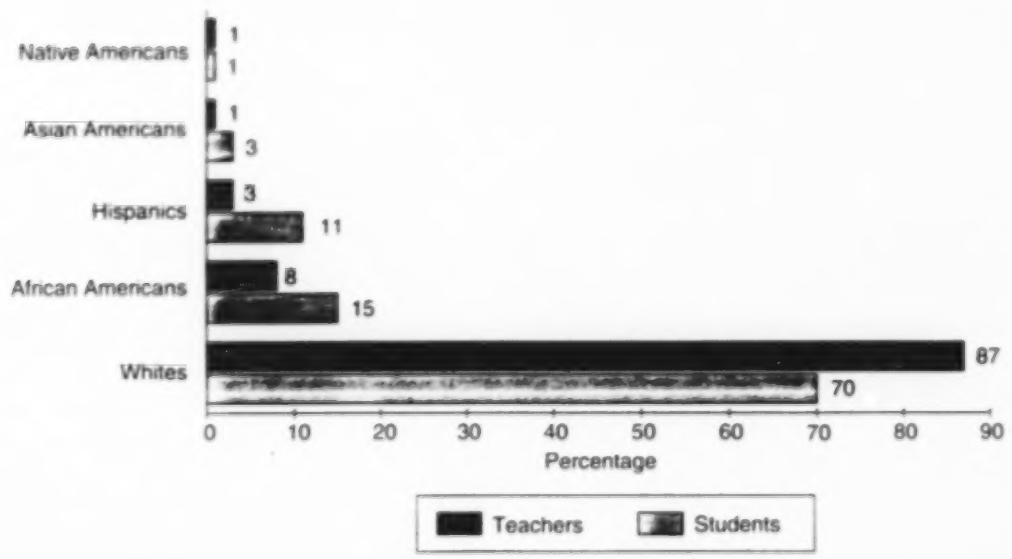
Where Teachers Teach

As did the country as a whole, a majority of states experienced an increase in the number of teachers between 1987–88 and 1990–91.

- Overall, only five states had fewer public school teachers in 1990–91 than in 1987–88: Iowa, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Oklahoma.

Figure 3

Percentage Distribution of Teachers and Students by Race/Ethnicity: 1990–91



SOURCE U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990–91*

- In contrast, seven states reported increases of more than 20 percent: Florida, Hawaii, Illinois, Nevada, North Carolina, Rhode Island, and Washington.

A majority of states also experienced an increase in the number of nonwhite teachers during the period, although the number decreased in almost one-third of the states.

- Sixteen states had fewer teachers of color in their public schools in 1990–91 than they did in 1987–88: Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, and Wisconsin.

Teachers of color often choose to teach in areas with high nonwhite enrollments because they feel they can relate well to the students.

- Many nonwhite teacher education students said they would like to teach in schools with high nonwhite enrollments because they can identify with the culture, because they want to serve as a role model to students, or because they feel a sense of duty to go back to their communities (Hood and Parker, 1994).

What They Teach

More than one-third (35 percent) of all school teachers had main assignments in kindergarten or general elementary subjects in 1990–91, while 13 percent taught math or science. Other subject areas with a large proportion of teachers include special education (10 percent), English/language arts (10 percent), vocational education (7 percent), and performing arts (7 percent).

School systems have added teaching positions in most subject areas in recent years. Between 1987–88 and 1990–91, the number of teachers in the fields of bilingual education/English as a second language and foreign languages increased the most (by 30 percent and 20 percent). However, two areas recorded sizable decreases during the period.

- The number of teachers with main assignments in basic skills/remedial education decreased by 47 percent.

- The number of teachers responsible for gifted education decreased by 31 percent.

Because of an increasing emphasis on the training and employment of individuals with disabilities, BLS expects positions in special education to increase rapidly into the 21st century.

- BLS projects that employment in special education will increase much faster than most occupations between 1992 and 2005, from 358,000 to 625,000 positions.

Vacant Teaching Positions

In 1990–91, approximately 2.7 million new teaching positions were approved by public school districts and private schools in the United States. School principals reported that nearly all of those positions (99 percent) were filled that year; only 1 percent (15,738) remained vacant. However, knowledgeable experts believe this figure might understate the actual number of teaching vacancies in any given year because school administrators use other methods, such as hiring substitutes or increasing class sizes, to cover open positions. Of the teaching positions that school principals reported vacant in 1990–91:

- Most vacancies (86 percent) were in public school systems.

- Within public schools, California had the largest number of teaching vacancies (2,830), followed by Texas (1,597). Other states with more than 500 vacant positions included Pennsylvania (872), Louisiana (762), Illinois (698), and Georgia (623) (Figure 4).

Difficulty in Filling Vacant Teaching Positions

Despite the growing number of teachers, positions in some subject areas are difficult to fill. An NCES *Schools and Staffing Survey* of school principals found that in 1990–91:

- Twenty-three percent said that filling vacant positions in special education was somewhat or very difficult, 13 percent had difficulty filling general elementary positions, and 10 percent found math positions difficult to fill (Figure 5).

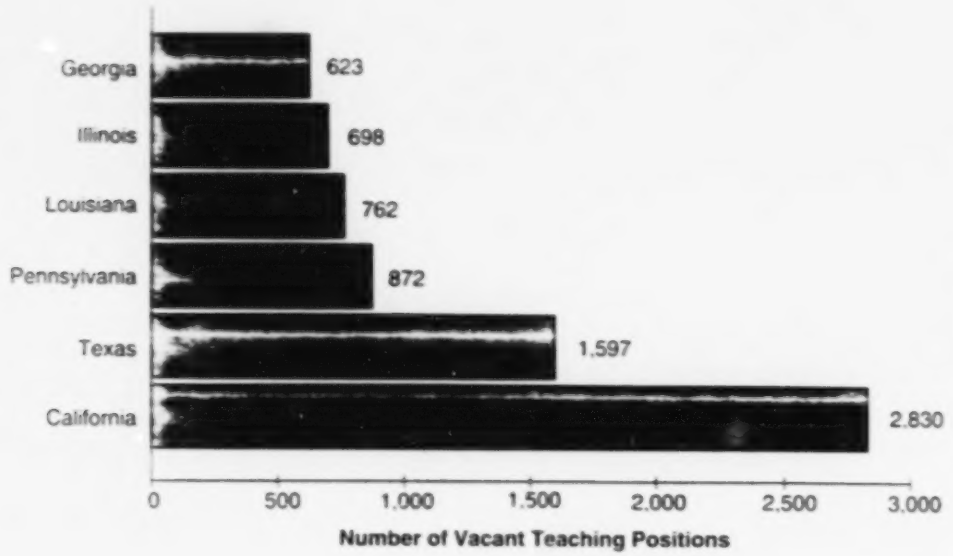
- Positions in English, English as a second language, and vocational education were less frequently described as difficult to fill (7 percent, 6 percent, and 5 percent).

Teachers Who Leave

Overall, the number of teachers has increased in recent years. However, many teachers continue to leave the profession each year, often because of their experiences in the classroom.

Figure 4

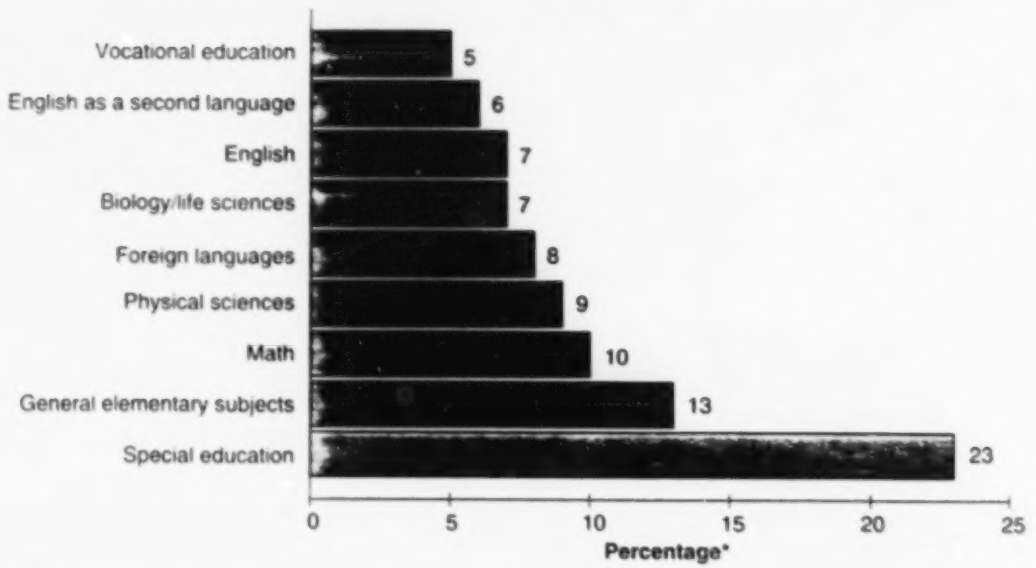
States with More Than 500 Vacant Public School Teaching Positions: 1990–91



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990–91.*

Figure 5

Difficulty in Filling Teaching Positions by Subject Area: 1990–91



*Percentage of public school principals who reported that positions were "somewhat difficult" or "very difficult" to fill.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Schools and Staffing Survey, 1990–91.*

Teacher attrition was higher in the private sector (12 percent) than in public school systems (5 percent) between 1990–91 and 1991–92. However, because most educators are public school teachers, attrition in this sector is examined more closely here. Between 1990–91 and 1991–92 (Figure 6):

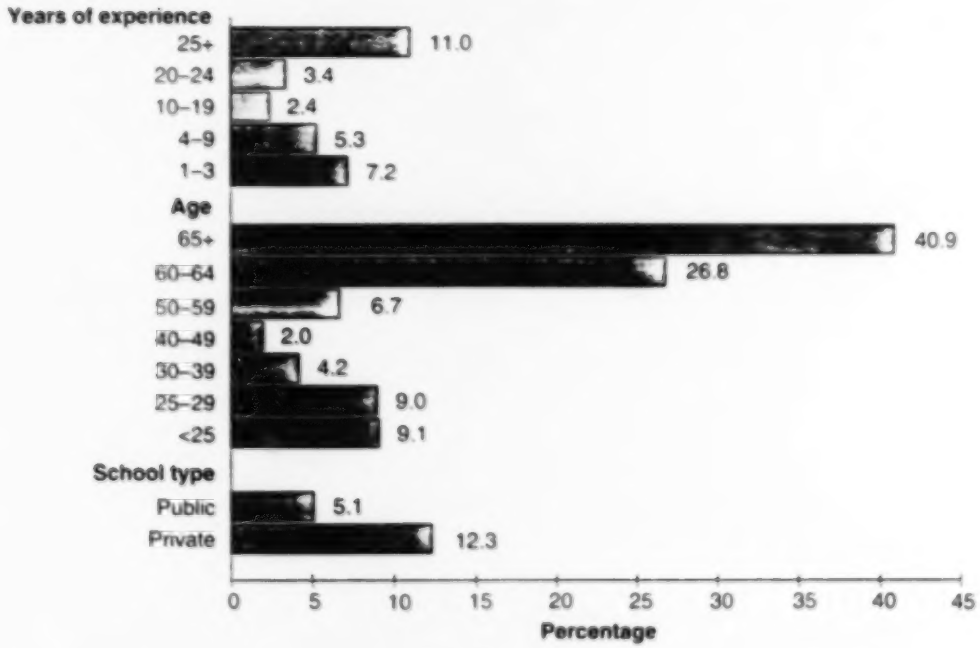
- New teachers were more likely to quit teaching than their more experienced counterparts. Those with one to three years of experience left the profession more often than those with 10–19 years of experience (7.2 percent vs. 2.4 percent).
- As might be expected, teachers of retirement age (65 years or older) were more likely to leave teaching (40.9 percent) than those of any other age group. Those between the ages of 40 and 49 were the least likely group to quit teaching (2.0 percent).
- The percentage of teachers who left the profession did not differ significantly by gender, race/ethnicity, or school level.

Examining teachers' classroom experiences provides some clues as to why teachers leave the profession. In 1992, the *Metropolitan Survey of the American Teacher* asked public school teachers with fewer than two years of experience if they were likely to leave teaching and their reasons for doing so. Their responses were as follows:

- Nineteen percent of all new teachers said they were fairly or very likely to leave teaching.
- Twenty-four percent of the new teachers in inner city/urban areas gave this response, compared with 18 percent of those in suburban/small town areas and 14 percent of those in rural areas.
- Twenty-one percent of the new teachers in schools with many low-income students said they were likely to leave, compared with 14 percent of those in schools with few low-income students.
- Twenty-seven percent of the new teachers in high schools said they were likely to leave the profession.

Figure 6

Rate at which Teachers Left the Profession between 1990–91 and 1991–92, by Selected Characteristics



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *Characteristics of Stayers, Movers, and Leavers: Results from the Teacher Follow-up Survey: 1991–92*, 1994.

compared with 18 percent of those in junior high/middle schools and 17 percent of those in elementary schools.

Of the 19 percent of all newly trained teachers who said they were fairly or very likely to leave teaching:

- Two in five (40 percent) cited a lack of support or help for students from parents. This problem was especially prevalent in rural high schools where many of the students were from low-income families.

- Twenty-nine percent listed a lack of support by school administration. This problem was noted most frequently by junior high/middle school teachers in inner cities where many of the students were from low-income families.

- Twenty-nine percent said they needed to earn more money. High school teachers in rural areas where few of the students were from low-income families were most likely to give this response.

- One-quarter said they thought social problems faced by students made teaching too difficult. This response was given most frequently by inner-city high school teachers with many low-income students.

Perhaps because of these problems, a National Education Association (NEA) survey found that fewer teachers today than 30 years ago would choose the teaching profession again. The *Status of the American Public School Teacher, 1991* found that:

- Fifty-nine percent of the teachers surveyed in 1991 would certainly or probably enter teaching again, down from 77 percent in 1961. However, the 1991 figure was up from 1981 and 1986, when less than half of all teachers said they would enter the profession again.

Conclusion

The number of teachers in the United States has increased in recent years, a trend that is expected to continue into the 21st century. However, groups that dominate the profession, such as women and whites, gained more positions than traditionally underrepresented groups between 1987–88 and 1990–91. Thus, few male students and students of color will have teachers with similar backgrounds and characteristics in years to come.

Recent surveys have found that new teachers and teacher education students felt their training had not prepared them to teach students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. As the number of nonwhite students in the United States continues to increase, a closer examination of diversity training in the teacher education curriculum may be warranted.

School principals reported that only about 1 percent of all approved teaching positions were vacant in 1990–91. However, because school administrators use various methods to fill vacancies, such as hiring substitutes or increasing class sizes, this figure might understate the actual number of open teaching positions in any given year. The states of California and Texas alone accounted for nearly one-third of the reported vacancies. School principals reported that positions in special education, general elementary education subjects, and math were more difficult to fill than those in other subject areas. In future years, BLS projects an increased demand for special education teachers.

Between 1990–91 and 1991–92, 5 percent of all public school teachers left the profession. As might be expected, those over the age of 65 were more likely than younger teachers to leave the profession. However, more than 7 percent of the teachers with one to three years of experience left teaching during that time as well.

New teachers who were considering leaving the teaching profession most often cited a lack of support by students' parents and school administration and the need to earn more money as reasons for their decision. Even if the number of teachers continues to increase, these issues need to be addressed to ensure that high-quality teachers are not lured to other professions.

Endnotes

[1] The *Metropolitan Life Survey of the American Teacher* was designed to measure the experiences of 1,000 new public school teachers who began teaching during the 1990–91 school year. For this study, Louis Harris Associates, Inc. conducted three surveys of this cohort. The first, conducted during the summer of 1990, examined the expectations of new graduates immediately prior to their first year of teaching. The second measured how their experiences in their first year of teaching affected their attitudes and how those experiences compared with their prior expectations. The most recent survey focused on their expectations two years into their teaching careers.

Resources

1. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) conducts six major surveys that collect information on various aspects of the teaching profession. Each survey

focuses on different elements of the educational system and provides a unique perspective on the teaching workforce. The surveys are the *Schools and Staffing Survey* (SASS); *National Assessment of Educational Progress* (NAEP); *National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988* (NELS:88); *Common Core of Data*; *Recent College Graduates*; and *National Survey of Postsecondary Faculty* (NSOPF). The SASS provides the greatest amount of data on elementary and secondary teachers, including demographic characteristics, education, qualifications, income sources, working conditions, and perceptions of the school environment and teaching profession. Summary tables from these reports also are published in an annual NCES publication, *Digest of Education Statistics*. For more information, contact NCES at (800) 424-1616.

2. The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) monitors the production of teachers and the quality of teacher education programs. AACTE conducts annual surveys on enrollment in teacher education programs, *Research About Teacher Education* (RATE), and teacher education pipeline studies. For more information, contact AACTE at (202) 293-2450.

3. The National Education Association (NEA) conducts the *Status of the American Public School Teacher* survey every five years. Initially administered in 1956, the survey gathers information on various aspects of public school teachers' professional, family, and civic lives. For more information, contact NEA at (202) 822-7750.

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